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IV.—SENECA THE PHILOSOPHER AND HIS THEORY OF STYLE.

It has been maintained, and without dissent, that the statements of Seneca on the subject of style cannot be reduced to a system, that they are inconsistent in important particulars with each other, that they differ from the writer's own practice to such an extent as to betray insincerity, and that they give evidence of a lack of settled judgment.¹ The severity of the criticism is intensified by the fact that what is made the object of such extreme censure was written by Seneca in the closing years of a long literary career. This very fact, however, together with the rigor of the judgment in itself, is sufficient to justify misgivings with reference to conclusions not supported by convincing demonstration, and to make it desirable, especially as it is a question in which our estimate of the intellectual and moral worth of Seneca is in some degree involved, to subject the whole matter to a more careful examination than it has hitherto received. In undertaking this we shall attempt in the first place to interpret and systematize the pertinent material in the writings of Seneca and afterwards to consider in detail the criticisms which we have already indicated.

When Seneca characterizes (ep. 114, 7) the faulty style of Maecenas as a monstrosity ("orationis portentosissimae") and in defending the style of Fabianus (ep. 100, 5) calls attention to the fact that the words are not used contrary to their nature ("contra naturam suam posita"), he applies a criterion that lies at the foundation of all his ideas about writing. It is the principle that excellence of style,—which word we shall use in the simple sense of manner of expression,—results from employing language according to nature. This is only a special application of the fundamental principle of his philosophy. He adopted

¹ Cf. A. Gercke, *Seneca-Studien*, *Jahrbücher für classische Philologie*, 22. Supplementband, Leipzig, 1896, S. 134 ff.; E. Norden, *Die antike Kunstprosa*, Leipzig, 1898, S. 307, 310; H. Peter, *Der Brief in der römischen Literatur*, Leipzig, 1901, S. 231.

without reserve and never tires of repeating the basic teaching of the Stoics that the highest good is to live according to nature (*de vita beata* 3, 3; *de otio* 5, 1; *ep.* 5, 4; etc.). He defines nature as divine reason implanted in the universe as a whole and in its parts (*de ben.* 4, 7, 1). There is no good, he says, without reason; reason follows nature; it is an imitation of nature (*ep.* 66, 39). Virtue is in accordance with nature (*ep.* 50, 8), all faults fight against nature (*ep.* 122, 5; 50, 8). This, then, the fountain-head of his habitual thinking, was the source also of the controlling idea in his theory of style.

Seneca's conception of what it is to follow nature in the use of language is clearly indicated in his criticism of the style of Maecenas, the monstrosity of which is illustrated by quotations and analyzed by an enumeration of the faults exemplified. The words, it is charged, are improperly put together, are flung down carelessly, are employed in a manner that conflicts with general usage. Complicated forms of expression and a wresting of words from their legitimate meaning are mentioned as characteristic of the same style, which is still further described as involved, wandering, full of license, drunk.¹ Summed up in this last epithet we find, as we might have expected, that a failure to write according to nature consists in disregarding the dictates of reason. All the other faults enumerated have the same cause. Even the assignment of a certain authority to general usage is a requirement resulting from the nature of speech, which does not have one fixed rule but changes with the age.²

This fundamental principle might be elucidated in one way or another by everything Seneca says on the subject of style. A few additional illustrations of its application will be sufficient. Disapproval of carelessness is further attested by praise of Fabianus, who avoiding this fault chose his words with care and employed them with brilliant effect, though taking them from the stock in common use, while at the same time he was free from

¹ *Ep.* 114, 7 *haec verba tam improbe structa, tam neglegenter abiecta, tam contra consuetudinem omnium posita ostendunt mores quoque non minus novos et pravos et singulares fuisse.*—114, 8 *istae ambages compositionis, verba transversa*—;—114, 4 *videbis itaque eloquentiam ebrii hominis involutam et errantem et licentiae plenam.*—19, 9 *est ergo tanti ulla potentia, ut sit tibi tam ebrius sermo?*

² *Ep.* 114, 13 *adice nunc, quod oratio certam regulam non habet: consuetudo illam civitatis, quae numquam in eodem diu stetit, versat.*

anxiety.¹ He is acquitted also of going to another extreme. It is declared (ep. 100, 8) that his style is not low ("humilia"), as it seemed to Lucilius, and that it should be likened, not to a depression ("depressa"), but to a plain ("plana"). This fault of extremes, of exceeding the proper bound (cf. ep. 114, 14 "plus iusto"), is one in which in greater or less degree control of reason is lost, nature abandoned, and monstrosity produced. It is a fault to which attention is called by Seneca again and again. Thus he condemns a love of the old that revives an ancient and obsolete diction and a love of the new that unnecessarily originates words and forms;² a fondness for what is out of use that makes even the Twelve Tables a model, and a fondness for what is in use that descends even to the low, and over against this again, arising from a distaste for the necessary and common, an exclusive employment of the brilliant and sonorous and poetic, and a too bold and frequent use of metaphor;³ further, obscure brevity in broken-off sentences that require more to be understood than is expressed, leaving the thought to be in part suspected, and the opposite fault of saying more than is fit by dwelling too long upon the same idea, or by overstating it;⁴ on the one hand, bombast and a studied roughness that is mistaken for manly vigor and, on the other hand, weakness and a smoothness

¹ Ep. 100, 5 Fabianus non erat neglegens in oratione sed securus. itaque nihil invenies sordidum: electa verba sunt, non captata nec huius saeculi more contra naturam suam posita et inversa, splendida tamen, quamvis sumantur e medio.

² Ep. 114, 10 modo antiqua verba atque exsoleta revocat ac profert, modo fingit et ignota ac deflectit.

³ Ep. 114, 13 sq. multi ex alieno saeculo petunt verba, duodecim tabulas loquuntur, Gracchus illis et Crassus et Curio nimis culti et recentes sunt, ad Appium usque et Coruncanium redeunt. quidam contra, dum nihil nisi tritum et usitatum volunt, in sordes incidunt. utrumque diverso genere corruptum est, tam mehercules quam nolle nisi splendidis uti ac sonantibus et poeticis, necessaria atque in usu posita vitare. tam hunc dicam peccare quam illum: alter se plus iusto colit, alter plus iusto neglegit.—114, 1 quare aliqua aetas fuerit, quae translationis iure uteretur inverecunde? —114, 10 pro cultu habetur audax translatio ac frequens.

⁴ Ep. 114, 1 quare alias sensus audaces et fidem egressi placuerint, alias abruptae sententiae et suspiciosae, in quibus plus intellegendum esset quam audiendum? —114, 11 sunt qui sensus praecidant et ex hoc gratiam sperent, si sententia pependerit et audienti suspicionem sui fecerit. sunt qui illos detineant et porrigant.—114, 17 sic Sallustio vigente anputatae sententiae et verba ante expectatum cadentia et obscura brevitatis fuere pro cultu.

that resembles a musical composition.¹ The faults of Maecenas and similar writers, who consciously and intentionally abandon a right form of expression, are pictured in general as unnaturalness by comparison with the toilet of those who pluck out the beard all over or in parts, or clip closely and shave the lips only, or wear glaring cloaks or a transparent toga, being indifferent, if they can but attract attention (ep. 114, 21).

Turning from the ideal of expression to possible accomplishment, we discover again a close connection between Seneca's theory of style and his philosophy. The perfectly wise man, the man who follows nature absolutely, is so seldom seen as to be practically a myth (ep. 42). Following nature is an approximation varying in degree and kind with the individual. If, then, excellence in writing depends on conformity to nature, it follows that a man's style is determined by his character. And this is what Seneca teaches. He adopts as an expression of his own view the Greek proverb, modernized by Buffon, that a man's speech corresponds to his life, that the style is the man. Language, he says, expressing the same thought in another form, is the dress of the mind and the qualities of the one are like those of the other. This agreement of course is not a mere coincidence. The one thing is the cause of similarity in the other. And it is the character of the mind that determines the character of the style, whether good or bad. The drunkenness of speech is due to drunkenness of mind. It is from the mind that words proceed. If this is sound and strong, speech also is sturdy, strong, and manly.² Even great writers, not having attained perfect

¹ Ep. 114, 1 quare quibusdam temporibus provenerit corrupti generis oratio quaeris et quomodo in quaedam vitia inclinatio ingeniorum facta sit, ut aliquando inflata explicatio vigeret, aliquando infracta et in morem cantici ducta? —114, 15 ad compositionem transeamus. quot genera tibi in hac dabo, quibus peccetur? quidam praefractam et asperam probant. disturbant de industria, si quid placidius effluxit. nolunt sine salebra esse iuncturam. virilem putant et fortem, quae aurem inaequalitate percutiat. quorundam non est compositio, modulatio est: adeo blanditur et molliter labitur.

² Ep. 114, 1 hoc quod audire vulgo soles, quod apud Graecos in proverbium cessit: talis hominibus fuit oratio qualis vita.—115, 2 oratio cultus animi est, etc.—114, 22 quomodo in vino non ante lingua titubat quam mens cessit oneri et inclinata vel prodita est: ita ista orationis quid aliud quam ebrietas nulli molesta est, nisi animus labat. ideo ille curetur: ab illo sensus, ab illo verba exeunt, ab illo nobis est habitus, vultus, incessus. illo sano ac valente oratio quoque robusta, fortis, virilis est: si ille procubuit, et cetera ruinam sequuntur.

conformity to nature, may be expected to have faults of style. Seneca points out that such is the case.¹ And, with all his admiration for Fabianus, he did not try to conceal the weaknesses that might be detected in a close examination of the details of what he wrote (ep. 100, 5; 100, 11).

If peculiarities of style result from corresponding peculiarities of character, style becomes an index of character. The relation of the two is more frequently referred to by Seneca under this aspect. The style of Maecenas is that of a drunken man. His loose speech reminds us of his loose tunic and other idiosyncrasies. The faults of his style show that he was effeminate, not mild, and that his head was turned by too much good fortune.² An anxious and polished style points to a mind occupied with trivial things.³ Bedizenment in toilet or language betokens a lack of soundness and strength (ep. 115, 2). Faults, to be sure, are propagated in some instances, he admits, by mere imitation without being an index of the man himself.⁴

The influence of character on style is not confined, according to Seneca, to the individual. When the strict morals of the state break down and give way to pleasure, the speech of the time is marked by an imitation of public manners.⁵ Good fortune spreads luxury abroad. This shows itself first in the care of the body, in furniture, in the houses themselves, in the table, and at last, when the mind forms the habit of feeling disgust for what is customary and regards the usual as low, it also strives after what is new in speech, coming at length, as it wanders away from nature, to love faultiness itself (ep. 114, 8-11). Nor is the cor-

¹ Ep. 114, 12 *da mihi quemcumque vis, magni nominis virum: dicam, quid illi aetas sua ignoverit, quid in illo sciens dissimulaverit.*

² Ep. 114, 4 *videbis itaque eloquentiam ebrii hominis.*—114, 4 *non oratio eius aequae soluta est quam ipse discinctus?*—114, 6 *non statim, cum haec legeris, hoc tibi occurret, hunc esse, qui solutis tunicis in urbe semper incesserit?* etc.—114, 8 *apparet enim mollem fuisse, non mitem.*—114, 8 *hoc istae ambages compositionis, hoc verba transversa, hoc sensus miri, magni quidem saepe, sed enervati dum exeunt, cuius manifestum facient: motum illi felicitate nimia caput.*

³ Ep. 115, 2 *cuiuscumque orationem videris sollicitam et politam, scito animum quoque non minus esse pusillis occupatum.*

⁴ Ep. 114, 20 *haec ergo et eiusmodi vitia, quae alicui inpressit imitatio, non sunt indicia luxuriae nec animi corrupti.*

⁵ Ep. 114, 2 *quemadmodum autem uniuscuiusque actio dicendis similis est, sic genus dicendi aliquando imitatur publicos mores, si disciplina civitatis laboravit et se in delicias dedit.*

rupt influence of a time seen in the speech of the uneducated only. It affects all classes, the more highly cultured being distinguished from the rest by dress, not by judgment (ep. 114, 12). Looked at from the opposite point of view, pleasure in a corrupt form of language is a proof that manners have deteriorated. License of speech, provided it is frequent, indicates a decline of public morals.¹

If, now, the general principle that underlies Seneca's theory of style should be applied in any particular case, it would be necessary to take into account three things, the kind of subject-matter, the character of the writer, and the character of the persons addressed. A style that would be in accordance with nature in one set of circumstances would not be in another. Seneca observes this principle. Much of what he says about writing has to do with one particular branch of literature. It is plain that this consideration cannot be left out of sight, if we would judge fairly either Seneca's theory or the style of his own works.

It is not difficult to determine what the specific style is to which so many of Seneca's observations pertain. He compares his letters with public oral address and shows them to be a better means of imparting the principles of philosophy (ep. 38). He discusses at length, with passing reference to style, the manner of delivery of a philosopher (ep. 40). He justifies the style of his letters to Lucilius by reference, not to a model epistolary form in general, but to the right method of presenting the truths of philosophy (ep. 75). In defending the style of Fabianus, while he admits that Fabianus lacks oratorical force (ep. 100, 8), he reminds Lucilius that they are considering the style, not of an orator, but of a philosopher (ep. 100, 1). And he compares Fabianus with Cicero and Livy, and perhaps with Asinius Pollio, as writers of philosophy (ep. 100, 9). Seneca's theory, then, though some of its features pertain to all kinds of writing and though some of his statements, as we have already seen, are made in the most general way, yet has to do primarily with a popular philosophical style.

¹ Ep. 114, 11 itaque ubicumque videris orationem corruptam placere, ibi mores quoque a recto descivisse non erit dubium. quomodo conviviorum luxuria, quomodo vestium aegrae civitatis indicia sunt, sic orationis licentia, si modo frequens est, ostendit animos quoque, a quibus verba exeunt, procidisse.

The several qualities of style recognized by Seneca as appropriate to philosophical writing may all be considered as growing out of the fundamental requirement of conformity to nature. In the first place, it follows from the nature of language as a means and not an end, that it should be the aim of the writer in any department of literature whatever to exhibit his matter rather than his style, in other words, to make his style unobtrusive. When the matter is philosophy, this quality of style becomes, from the point of view of Seneca, all the more important. He has greater things for Lucilius to attend to than words and the putting of them together. He wishes him in writing to consider the what, not the how. He expresses admiration for Fabianus, because he gave his thought, not to so insignificant a thing as words, but to the importance of his subject; because he constructed character, not sentences; because he wrote for the heart and not for the ear; because he made everything contribute to progress toward virtue and did not seek applause; because, when he received applause, he gained it, not by the charm of his style, but by the greatness of his thought.¹ Philosophy, he maintains, does not have for its purpose to please the people. That is for other arts. The words of the philosopher should be spoken, not for the pleasure, but for the profit of the hearer. Philosophy, unlike other arts, which are concerned with the intellect only, has to do with the affairs of the heart, with character. If it were possible, Seneca would prefer to show rather than to say what he thinks, putting language entirely out of sight.² And this is not merely a matter of purpose on the part of the writer. The style as such should be self-effacing. Its charm, if it has any, should be such as to exhibit the matter rather than itself. Eloquence of expression harms, if it creates a desire for itself rather

¹ Ep. 115, 1 *nimis anxium esse te circa verba et compositionem, mi Lucili, nolo: habeo maiora, quae cures. quaere quid scribas, non quemadmodum. —100, 10 vis illum adsidere pusillae rei, verbis: ille rerum se magnitudini addixit. —100, 2 mores ille, non verba composuit et animis scripsit ista, non auribus. —100, 11 ad profectum omnia tendunt, ad bonam mentem, non quaeritur plausus. —52, 11 disserebat populo Fabianus, sed audiebatur modeste. erumpebat interdum magnus clamor laudantium, sed quem rerum magnitudo evocaverat, non sonus inoffense ac molliter orationis elapsae.*

² Ep. 52, 13 *relinquantur istae voces illis artibus, quae propositum habent populo placere: philosophia adoretur. —75, 5 non delectent verba nostra, sed prosint. —75, 5 aliae artes ad ingenium totae pertinent, hic animi negotium agitur. —75, 2 si fieri posset, quid sentiam, ostendere quam loqui mallet.*

than for the thing communicated.¹ Lucilius is praised for keeping his words under control, for not being carried away by the language, for making everything concise and suited to the subject, for saying as much as he wishes and signifying more than he says, in short, for keeping language subordinate and letting it do its proper work of communicating thought and not attracting attention to itself.²

And yet Seneca does not teach that beauty is objectionable in the philosophical style. He approves of the eloquence, elegance, and brilliancy of the style of Fabianus (ep. 58, 6; 100, 5). He is careful to say that he does not wish philosophical discourse, dealing as it does with great themes, to be meagre and dry.³ He makes, however, in this connection a second requirement for the philosophical style: it should have the quality of being easy. If charm of expression can be attained without anxious attention to it, if it is ready at hand or costs but little, it should accompany a most glorious matter. In this very ease of speech there is a characteristic beauty. But a great deal of work should not be expended on the words. Fabianus, though not careless, did not trouble himself about his style; though eloquent, he did not aim to be so but drew his eloquence after him like a shadow.⁴ This ease should also appear in the language itself. The style of the philosopher should not be anxious. Of this, too, Fabianus furnishes an exemplification. He not only wrote easily but he put his thought in a form that pictured this ease. His language is fluent and shows plainly that he did not work at it a long time. The words are well chosen but have not been hunted up with effort. And with reference to himself Seneca, in reply to the criticism that his letters are not written with sufficient care, ridicules an anxious style and declares that

¹ Ep. 75, 5 sit talis, ut res potius quam se ostendat.—52, 14 nocet illis eloquentia, si non rerum cupiditatem facit, sed sui.

² Ep. 59, 4 habes verba in potestate. non effert te oratio nec longius quam destinasti trahit.—59, 5 pressa sunt omnia et rei aptata. loqueris quantum vis et plus significas quam loqueris.

³ Ep. 75, 3 non mehercules ieiuna esse et arida volo, quae de rebus tam magnis dicentur. neque enim philosophia ingenio renuntiat.

⁴ Ep. 75, 5 si tamen contingere eloquentia non sollicito potest, si aut parata est aut parvo constat, adsit et res pulcherrimas prosequatur.—100, 1 est decor proprius orationis leniter lapsae.—75, 3 multum tamen operae impendi verbis non oportet.—100, 5 Fabianus non erat neglegens in oratione sed securus.—100, 10 eloquentiam velut umbram non hoc agens trahit.

he wishes his letters to be unlabored and easy like familiar conversation. Pains-taking polish he does not regard as a manly ornament.¹ This quality of ease follows from conformity to nature. It is the processes governed by right reason that go on without effort.

Reason looked at as virtue demands that the style of the philosopher be sincere. To this quality Seneca gives especial emphasis. It is disgraceful, in his view, for the philosopher to say one thing and think another, and still more disgraceful to write one thing and think another. There should be harmony between thought and word, life and speech. And it is the thought, the character that should receive the greater attention.² The spirit of the man should appear also in his language. The sincerity of his life, as in the case of Fabianus, should be stamped upon his style. This is a quality that Seneca also professes to have aimed at in his own writings.³

Out of sincerity springs another quality of style akin to it. The man who means what he says does not try to cover up his thought but to make it clear. In so doing he conforms to the nature of language, the purpose of which is to reveal thought, not to conceal it. In cautioning Lucilius not to give too much attention to the subtleties in which the Stoics had been prone to indulge, Seneca says, in a general way, it is the things which are clear that become virtue.⁴ And more specifically, with reference to manner of expression, he points out as one of the

¹ Ep. 100, 4 oratio sollicita philosophum non decet.—100, 2 illud plane fatetur et praeferit, non esse tractatam nec diu tortam.—100, 5 electa verba sunt, non captata.—75, 1 minus tibi accuratas a me epistulas mitti quereris. quis enim accurate loquitur, nisi qui vult putide loqui? qualis sermo meus esset, si una sederemus aut ambulares, inlaboratus et facilis, tales esse epistulas meas volo.—115, 2 oratio cultus animi est: si circumtensa est et fucata et manu facta, ostendit illum quoque non esse sincerum et habere aliquid fracti. non est ornamentum virile concinnitas.

² Ep. 24, 19 turpe est aliud loqui, aliud sentire: quanto turpius aliud scribere, aliud sentire!—75, 4 haec sit propositi nostri summa: quod sentimus loquamur, quod loquimur sentiamus: concordet sermo cum vita.—115, 1 quare quid scribas, non quemadmodum. et hoc ipsum non ut scribas, sed ut sentias, ut illa quae senseris magis adplices tibi et velut signes.

³ Ep. 100, 11 denique illud praestabit, ut liqueat tibi illum sensisse quae scripsit. intelleges hoc actum, ut tu scires quid illi placeret, non ut ille placeret tibi.—75, 3 hoc unum plane tibi adprobare vellem, omnia me illa sentire quae dicerem nec tantum sentire sed amare.

⁴ Ep. 48, 12 aperta decent et simplicia bonitatem.

faults in the unnatural style of Maecenas, that he avoided being understood, and censures the obscure brevity that was the fashion in the time of Sallust. On the other hand, he regards it as one of the merits of Fabianus that there was much light in all he wrote and that his language though fluent was free from confusion. He approves also of figurative language, when not employed to excess, because it takes the speaker and hearer into the very presence of the object.¹

A prime condition of clearness is another quality distinct from clearness but closely related to it. Seneca himself links the two in a sentence already quoted in part. Things that are clear, he says, and things that are simple become virtue (ep. 48, 12). This is a matter of both thought and language. Referring to the crafty shrewdness and the knotty questions of Stoic dialectics, he demands of the philosopher simplicity of reasoning (ep. 49, 12; 82, 19). As regards language, we find him censuring the involved style of Maecenas, declaring that the style which has to do with truth ought to be simple, likening the style of Fabianus, which he approves, to a plain house of simple beauty as contrasted with one abounding in luxury, objecting to an extreme use of figures of speech, but not to the use of them as employed in the simple style of the ancients, assuring Lucilius that in speaking orally he would be content to present his thoughts plainly without embellishing or weakening them.² From the point of view of simplicity may also be explained Seneca's fondness for short sentences in preference to long periods, which he disliked.³ According to

¹ Ep. 114, 4 magni vir ingenii fuerat, si illud egisset via rectiore, si non vitasset intellegi.—114, 17 sic Sallustio vigente anputatae sententiae et verba ante expectatum cadentia et obscura brevitatis fuere pro cultu.—100, 11 sed multum erit in omnibus lucis.—100, 2 adeo larga est et sine perturbatione.—59, 6 parabolis referti sunt, quas existimo necessarias, non ex eadem causa qua poetis, sed ut inbecillitatis nostrae adminicula sint, ut et dicentem et audientem in rem praesentem adducant.

² Ep. 114, 4 videbis itaque eloquentiam ebrii hominis involutam.—40, 4 adice nunc, quod quae veritati operam dat oratio incompta esse debet et simplex.—100, 6 desit sane varietas marmorum et concisura aquarum cubiculis interfluentium et pauperis cella et quicquid aliud luxuria non contenta decore simplici miscet: quod dici solet, domus recta est.—59, 6 illi qui simpliciter et demonstrandae rei causa eloquebantur parabolis referti sunt.—75, 2 ista oratoribus reliquissem, contentus sensus meos ad te pertulisse, quos nec exornassem nec abiecissem.

³ Ep. 114, 16 quid de illa loquar, in qua verba differuntur et diu expectata vix ad clausulas redeunt?

these examples, the simple style becoming a philosopher has two phases: it is not involved or complicated, whether in arrangement of words or in complexity of parts; and, while it may have ornament, it must not have excess of ornament.

Two other qualities of the philosophical style are touched upon by Seneca. The first is prescribed by the nature of language, the purposes of which are best realized when it is pure. Seneca speaks of his own age as having departed from purity of speech.¹ He justifies the use of a word by referring to Cicero and Fabianus as authorities (ep. 58, 6). And he praises the carefully chosen words of Fabianus (ep. 100, 5). The other quality is one especially appropriate to the matter to be communicated by the philosopher as conceived by Seneca. It is nobility of style. He thought that the style of Fabianus had this quality. There was nothing low in it. His thoughts were noble and grand, and his manner, though not free from defects, was on the whole noble.²

Such were the qualities that Seneca deemed appropriate to the philosophical style. He no doubt thought that they could be combined in different literary forms for the uses of philosophy; and yet he apparently came to regard one of these forms as especially advantageous for promulgating that kind of philosophy which he considered the most important. As we have already seen, his remarks on style are found almost exclusively in his letters and in some cases have direct reference to them. He also expressly points out the superiority of this more quiet form ("summissiora verba") to the philosophical lecture (ep. 38). So far, indeed, as particular qualities of style are concerned, the letter must be regarded as in the highest degree favorable for attaining ease, sincerity, and simplicity.

We find, then, underlying the statements made by Seneca concerning manner of expression the fundamental principle that style should conform to nature. It appears further that the attainment of this ideal is hindered more or less and in different ways by defects and peculiarities of character; that a philosophical style should be distinguished from other types; that the desirable qualities of such a style are unobtrusiveness, ease, sincerity, clearness, simplicity, purity, and nobility; and that a form highly adapted for this combination of qualities is the literary epistle.

¹ Ep. 39, 1 olim, cum latine loqueremur, summarium vocabatur.

² Ep. 100, 5 nihil invenies sordidum.—100, 5 sensus honestos et magnificos habes.—100, 8 sed totum corpus, videris quam sit comptum, honestum est.

Thus far we have been dealing with Seneca's ideas as such without any effort to determine which were borrowed and which, if any, were his own. Looking at this phase of his theory one can see at a glance that many of its details were already common-places of rhetoric, while in the case of other features the question of originality is not so easily settled. Seneca's idea of the natural in writing, that is, conformity to nature in the broad Stoic sense, should not be confounded with the more narrow and more common meaning of the word natural. It is in the latter sense that Aristotle says the orator should have the appearance of using language, not artificially, but naturally (*rhet.* 3, 2, 4). Confusion as to what was natural had begun already in the time of Quintilian. Some thought that only the style resembling ordinary conversation was natural and that the style of the most ancient writers followed nature most closely. Quintilian himself, with nearer approach to the view of Seneca, declares that conversation and oratory differ in nature and that the more effective a man's speech is, the more it accords with the nature of eloquence (12, 10, 40-44), in other words, that it is natural in proportion as it is effective. Seneca's idea is simply a special application of the Stoic principle.

The relation between character and style was in general, as indicated by the Greek proverb, already familiar. But, as has been pointed out by Norden (*I, S.* 306), it received from Seneca a more energetic treatment than from any one else in antiquity. This was due to the close connection between individual character and the adapting of style to nature.

It was only carrying out one of the earliest teachings of rhetoric, namely, that the language should be appropriate to the subject-matter (*Arist. rhet.* 3, 2, 1; 3, 12, 1), to require a distinctive style for philosophy. Cicero, indeed, had done this (*orator* 19, 62-63). He had characterized the styles of the Greek and Roman writers on philosophy (*de orat.* 3, 18, 66; *de fin.* 1, 5, 14-15; 3, 1, 3; *Tusc. disp.* 2, 3, 7-8) and had given his own idea of what the philosophical style should be (*orator* 19, 64; *Tusc. disp.* 1, 4, 7).

Among the special qualities of style clearness and purity were regular requirements. Cicero, in his discussion of the philosophical manner of presentation, takes it for granted that attention is to be directed to the matter rather than to the words (*orator* 16, 51). At the same time, to illustrate the importance of the

how as well as of the what in philosophy, he quotes the remark of Carneades, that Clitomachus taught the same things but Charmadas not only taught the same things but taught them in the same way. Seneca's father had spoken of the style of Arellius Fuscus as too labored and polished for a person preparing himself to teach philosophy, and had also objected to it on the ground that it was too intricate, that is, lacked the simplicity which a philosophical style should have (II praef. 1).

The philosophical letter had been so often used before that it is not easy to ascertain what led to its approval and adoption by Seneca. The most plausible explanation is suggested by Seneca's earliest letters, in which he so frequently quotes Epicurus. When Seneca was writing these letters he seems to have been reading the letters of Epicurus (cf. ep. 9, 8; 14, 17), letters famous in antiquity for their simplicity and clearness (cf. Cic. de fin. I, 5, 14-16; Laert. Diog. 10, 13), which qualities we find Seneca emphasizing as appropriate to the language of philosophy.

In so far as the details of Seneca's theory are concerned, we have discovered little that was absolutely new. Certain ideas, however, received from his hand a decidedly new emphasis and new prominence, especially the relation of style to character, the recognition of a philosophical style, and the qualities of unobtrusiveness, ease, and sincerity. His combination of qualities for a philosophical style is, also, not found elsewhere. The connection of his views with the fundamental principle of his philosophy and the special emphasis upon the relation between style and character give an ethical tone to the whole discussion.

In this last feature we see in part the purpose that led him to express himself on the subject. It came within the scope of moral philosophy. It had to do with an important element of life, which in all its activities the Stoics sought to bring under the regulations of their system. His purpose had at the same time a practical side. He professes to answer criticisms of Lucilius upon the style of his letters (ep. 75, 1). It is probable that he had others also in mind besides Lucilius. In view of the conflicting literary tendencies of the time,¹ we may conjecture that criticism of his style, so frequent later, had begun already in his own life-time, notwithstanding the widespread popularity (cf. Quint. 10, 1, 126) of his writings.

¹ Cf. ep. 114, 13 sqq. and Norden, l. c., I, S. 257.

Having set forth Seneca's theory in full, we may now examine the contradictions and weaknesses by which it is supposed to be disfigured. First of all, it has been said that the mention of *abruptae sententiae et suspiciosae* as a fault (ep. 114, 1) does not harmonize with the praise of Lucilius for a conciseness of expression in which he signifies more than he says (ep. 59, 5). When we examine the first of these passages, we find that the fault referred to consists in a brevity that is carried to the point of obscurity. In the same letter farther on Seneca designates this particular fault as *obscura brevitās* (ep. 114, 17). But he does not speak of the style of Lucilius as leaving something to be suspected nor indicate in any other way that Lucilius fails to make his meaning perfectly clear. The supposed inconsistency, accordingly, does not exist. Between condemnation of obscure brevity and commendation of pregnant brevity there is no conflict.

A still further contradiction has been assumed between the censure of sentences the meaning of which is obscured by excessive brevity and approval of the pointed expressions that are technically called *sententiae*. It is not of the latter but of thoughts that Seneca is speaking in the passage in which he says that faults are not confined to the *genus sententiarum* (ep. 114, 16). His sanction of the *sententiae* in the technical sense, in theory as well as in practice, is unmistakable and uniform. While he admits that they are lacking in the writings of Fabianus, the excellence of whose style shows itself in other ways (ep. 100, 5; 100, 8), he refers with pride to the frequent use of such expressions by the Stoics in general (ep. 33, 2-3; 33, 6). But fondness for the epigrammatic sentence is not inconsistent with disapproval of obscure, short sentences, whether they be plain or pointed. A sentence may be brief and epigrammatic and signify more than is actually expressed in words and yet not have the fault of obscure brevity.

Seneca's emphatic disapproval of the impetuously rapid delivery of Serapio (ep. 40) is supposed to be in conflict with what he says about Fabianus (ep. 100, 1-3). Let us examine the two statements. In the one case Seneca is speaking solely of the delivery of Serapio, whom Lucilius had recently heard. This was so rapid that the word *effundere* did not seem strong enough to picture the torrent of speech, which is described by the words *premere* and *urgere*. In the other case Seneca discusses, not

the delivery, but the style of Fabianus, whose works Lucilius had been reading. The fluency of the style Seneca admits but describes it by the simple *fundere*. Then, granting for the sake of argument the correctness of the criticism of Lucilius, he adds that, if Fabianus had been heard instead of read, his style as a whole would have won the approval of Lucilius, although, had there been time to examine the parts, defects would have been found in them, but, that after all, the man who wins our approval is greater than the one who merits it. Whether the delivery of Fabianus was rapid or slow is not indicated. It is obvious that what Seneca praises in Fabianus is not what he censures in Serapio.

The statements that the philosophical style should be simple (ep. 40, 4) and that it should not be meagre and dry (ep. 75, 3) have been declared to be contradictory. What Seneca means by a simple style has apparently not been seen. For, if with him we understand it to be a style not involved nor overloaded with ornament, we have no reason for assuming that simplicity and charm of speech exclude each other.

Seneca has been criticised for presenting together Cicero, Pollio, and Livy in comparison with Fabianus (ep. 100, 9). But, as we have seen above, he compares Cicero and Livy, and probably Pollio, with Fabianus as writers of philosophy, assigning to each a rank, just as we are accustomed to compare Shakespeare and Milton in a general way with all subsequent English poets.

The alleged contradiction between *composita* (ep. 40, 2) and *incomposita* (ep. 40, 4) disappears when the text is properly constituted by writing with Schultess in the second passage *incompta*.

In regard to the style of Seneca himself only one question is pertinent to our present inquiry: Are there such discrepancies between his practice and his theory as to indicate insincerity in the presentation of the latter? It must be borne in mind that he did not claim to have attained absolute wisdom, to follow nature perfectly (ep. 6, 1; 42, 1). If he was ready to point out some fault in the style of every great writer (ep. 114, 12), he did not think his own free from fault. In fact, he makes no exception of himself in speaking of the diminished purity of speech in his times (ep. 39, 1) and he explicitly acknowledges his occasional shortcomings in respect to propriety in the use of words (nat. quaest. 3, 18, 7). So far as the other qualities are concerned, he

leaves us to judge for ourselves. On certain points there can hardly be a difference of opinion. His style shows plainly enough that he wrote with ease. While he is not always free from obscurity, he is for the most part clear. While his tone is at times too familiar, perhaps, to be called noble, it is not low. Keeping in mind, as we are bound to do, that as conceived by Seneca a simple style is a style not involved nor overloaded with ornament, we must admit that in general his style is simple. Two qualities remain, unobtrusiveness and sincerity. If, as is customary, we proceed in the unjust fashion of Quintilian and, judging Seneca by the usage of an age quite different from his own, measure his style by the standard of Ciceronian prose, we shall not find it unobtrusive, but attracting our attention at every step. If, on the other hand, in reading the works of this man so conspicuously in harmony with the taste of his time (cf. Tac. ann. 13, 3), we could take the point of view of intelligent and unprejudiced contemporaries, we should receive a far different impression. If, finally, we give due weight to the consideration that he composed without effort and that the epigrammatic form was the natural utterance of his acute and unique mind, we shall not be unable to reconcile with his manner of expression the statement that there is one thing of which he wishes to convince Lucilius above all others, namely, that he means what he says (ep. 75, 3). He fell short, to some extent, of his ideal. But a failure to realize fully in practice what he aimed at proves no insincerity in the aim.

It appears, accordingly, that the statements of Seneca on the subject of style, though not put forth in systematic form, can nevertheless be reduced to a system; that they are not, when properly interpreted, inconsistent with each other; that they are not at variance with Seneca's own practice to such an extent as to betray insincerity; that they are not marked by a lack of settled judgment; and that in some aspects they contain an element of originality.

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